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Summer 2011

Review of *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710-1840* by William H. Truettner

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Hausdoerffer, John, "Review of *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710-1840* by William H. Truettner" (2011).
Great Plains Quarterly. 2703.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2703>

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Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710–1840. By William H. Truettner. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. xi + 159 pp. Photographs, illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Just when the problematic relationship between Indian portraits and the cultural politics of nineteenth-century America seemed thoroughly explored, William Truettner's new book adds vital detail to our understanding of "portrait diplomacy" and "artistic imperialism." Truettner opens with an insightful distinction between the "Noble Savage" of eighteenth-century British artists and the "Republican Indian" of artists in nineteenth-century America. British "Noble Savage" imagery depicted Mohawks as a "sovereign people" and as "visiting royalty." Truettner shows how artists such as William Hodges, Thomas Hardy, and Benjamin West portrayed Indian leaders as both active in the future of colonial politics and comfortable with a level of "cross-dressing" or "hybrid status" between Indian and European dress and societies.

With this eighteenth-century context in mind, Truettner turns his focus to portraits of Upper Missouri "Republican Indians" in the 1820s and 1830s. His central claim is that "whatever sympathy they evoked as an untouched, fiercely independent people had the predictable twist of making them seem less capable of adapting to a new order in the West And from there it was only a short step to become—in one of the more ominous and evasive phrases of the time—a vanishing race." Artists such as Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, and Alfred Jacob Miller offered romantic rather than noble savage images, placing Republican Indians in a "time warp" that further depleted their sovereignty and accelerated the imperialistic shift from assimilation to removal of Indians as the fairest response to their struggle.

Truettner is a skilled critic, particularly in his analysis of the cultural politics of art. He supports

his analyses with compelling evidence from a diversity of artists, rooted in historical context. The great contribution of this book, to art historians, western historians, and to anyone fascinated with the complicated history of the Great Plains, lies in his comparison with the earlier era of the "Noble Savage." This magnifies the reader's understanding of how extensively Upper Missouri tribes and leaders had lost their political autonomy by the 1820s. Nevertheless, Truettner could have conveyed this loss of agency in how Indians were *represented* even more persuasively had he included a sharper portrayal of Indian *reality* and subjectivity.

Overall, *Painting Indians* offers an engaging assessment of how artists memorialized the past, rather than strengthened the future, of societies falsely predicted to become "vanishing races." Like Robert Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian* (1978), Brian Dippie's *The Vanishing American* (1982), and John Hausdoerffer's *Catlin's Lament* (2009), Truettner's book raises important concerns about well-intended white portrayals that functioned more as tombstones for Upper Missouri tribes than as calls for justice.

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